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ABSTRACT

In 1991, the California Center for School Restructuring (CCSR) was charged with assisting approximately 144 schools that were funded by California's SB 1274 restructuring legislation. This study investigated the work of the CCSR, not to evaluate the organization, but to tell the story of CCSR and its attempts to encourage and enable schools to focus on ensuring that every child not only receives a good education but also learns in powerful ways. The paper begins with a description of the methodology, including qualitative written surveys and telephone interviews, and the guiding questions, procedures, and data-analysis techniques that were used. Forty-one individuals who held various positions in the restructuring were identified from around California to participate in the study. The findings identified numerous themes, which are organized around the four guiding questions: What is unique about CCSR as an organization? What work is being done by CCSR? What factors have shaped the development of CCSR activities? and What work remains to be done? The themes that emerged include CCSR's belief that California's restructuring initiative must center on, start from, and flow from learning and teaching and that CCSR embraces a nondirective approach to promoting change. Almost all site administrators or teachers spoke favorably of various statewide activities sponsored by CCSR. Some of the lessons learned include the need to give schools ample time to restructure and recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of modeling as a reform strategy. (Contains 30 references.) (RJM)

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Supporting School-Based Reform: Lessons from the Work of the California Center for School Restructuring

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SUPPORTING SCHOOL-BASED REFORM: LESSONS FROM THE WORK OF THE CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Introduction

In recent years a number of researchers (e.g. David, 1989; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Louis & Miles, 1990; Marsh & Odden, 1991; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1989; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Walker, 1990; Wilson & Corbett, 1990) have attempted to assess the efficacy of various school reform efforts and to identify factors that seem to shape both successes and failures. Several themes have emerged from this research. First, scholars tend to agree that even under optimum conditions, reform is incredibly complex -- "a kind of juggling act" (Warren, 1990, p.76) -- where multiple activities occur simultaneously and numerous factors interact to either support or hinder change. Such a reality means that it is difficult to untangle causes from effects and to determine with any degree of certainty that outcomes are linked to particular efforts to transform schools. A second theme running across much of the research is that, in general, most reforms have not had the impact policy makers, educational administrators, teachers, and parents envisioned or hoped for. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Wohlstetter & Smyer, 1994), serious efforts to transform schools have not -- to date -- resulted in the dramatic change in student achievement that, for most, is a central goal. Finally, scholars are beginning to insist that research or reform cannot assume that a school or district operates in isolation, unaffected by larger environmental factors such as economic or demographic shifts or changes in social or political climates (e.g., Firestone, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Marsh, 1994; Smith & O'Day, 1991).

Taken in total, the themes highlighted above present challenges to those actively undertaking reform. For policy makers and practitioners, the notions that reform is complicated, that few reform efforts are likely to accomplish their stated goals, and that

environmental factors, often outside their direct control, are sobering thoughts. Faced with these realities, persons concerned about education have three choices. Operating under the assumption that the status quo, however disappointing, is preferable to changes that require great effort and have no guarantee of success, they can opt to do nothing, to simply wait and hope that conditions within schools will somehow improve. Alternatively, they can push ahead with some kind of reform, hoping that their work will be the exception to the rule and somehow "fix" schools. Or they can proceed with clear and grounded theories of action and do as much as possible to enhance the conditions of learning and teaching with a commitment to learn from their successes and failures.

The project we are reporting on here is one that appears to fall into this last camp. Charged in 1991 with the task of assisting approximately 144 schools funded by California's SB 1274 restructuring legislation, the California Center for School Restructuring (CCSR) is an organization that engaged in the struggle of supporting the transformation of individual school sites to improve children's learning. It grounded its theories in relevant research and was committed to a self examination of successes and failures to provide a basis upon which to build future efforts to guide its work, traits typically uncharacteristic of most reform organizations.

To assist with their self examination, we were approached by the Center's leaders to conduct a case study to glean insights from its own endeavors that might be useful to policy makers, to organizations committed to supporting and encouraging school site reform, and to the Center's staff itself as they consider ways to continue their work. We became intrigued with the possibility of studying the Center for two reasons. First, we respected the Center's commitment to honest examination of its work. It seemed to us that all too often groups or organizations committed to reform run from rigorous consideration of what they are doing out of fear that results will not paint them in an all-together favorable light. This was not the case with the California Center for School Restructuring as they

seemed to be honestly seeking to model one of the ideas that they were promoting in schools.

A second reason we were attracted to the project was our realization that this type of investigation could make an interesting contribution to the growing body of research on school reform. As we reviewed scholarship on school improvement efforts, we realized that much of the work in this area falls into two arenas. The first and largest of these contains research that attempts to understand how transformation occurs (or does not occur) within school sites (e.g., Beck & Murphy, 1996; Elmore, Peterson & McCarthy, 1995; Louis & Miles, 1990). The second includes work that focuses on the efficacy of reform programs or policies with specific agendas or platforms and a fairly prescribed set of activities (e.g. Brandt, 1992; Comer, 1980; Levin, 1987; Muncey & McQuillan, 1993). We believed that a study of CCSR would fall somewhere in between these two orientations and would complement work already done, for it seemed that a study of the Center itself would differ in focus from studies of school sites in that the latter were seeking to transform themselves, while CCSR was interested primarily in encouraging and supporting the transformation of others. Further, CCSR's program or platform for change appeared to be built upon a small set of core or guiding principles but not upon prescribed activities or structures. For these reasons, the model of change advocated by the Center and the role and work of staff in promoting it are slightly different from those embraced by other reforms. Documenting this work seemed important simply because it could not only add to our knowledge of change forces in schools but might also offer a unique and promising approach for supporting school reform.

Thus, we agreed to investigate the work of the California Center for School Restructuring, not to evaluate this organization, but rather to tell the story of CCSR and its attempts to encourage and enable schools to focus on ensuring that every child, not only receives a good education, but actually learns in powerful ways. This paper contains the results of our work and is ordered in the following manner. We begin with a description of

our methodology including the guiding questions, procedures, and data analysis techniques used as we attempted to create and analyze a rich data set that could give us insight into the Center. We then present our results responding specifically to the research questions. In this section, a certain amount of narrative about actual activities and decisions of CCSR personnel is interwoven with analytical comments about the reasons events unfolded as they did. We also focus on our insights about the Center especially noting changes that occurred in the Center's work in response to the ways schools were undertaking (and succeeding with or failing at) reform. Finally, we close with a discussion of the major lessons learned related to positive school change and their implications.

Methodology

Guiding Questions

As mentioned above, the purpose of our study was not to evaluate the California Center for School Restructuring. Rather, we hoped to document the work of this organization since its beginnings in 1991 and, from CCSR's story, to glean ideas or insights about educational reform and about how it might be supported. As we planned ways to tackle the enormous task of capturing the work of a center that operates out of two regional headquarters and that works with well over one hundred highly diverse schools in California, we identified several very broad questions to guide our study:

1. What, if anything, is unique about the California Center for School Restructuring as an organization, and what is unique about the work being done? Or, how do its theories or models of change and its "modes" of operation differ from those of other school change organizations?
2. What work is being done by the Center and what factors have shaped the development of CCSR's activities?
3. What is valued about the Center's work?
4. What work remains to be done?

Procedures

In designing our investigation, we decided that a multi-faceted data gathering approach could provide us with the greatest amount of information. In order to maximize our data collection efforts during the months of January through April, 1997, and to minimize the distances between the researchers and CCSR headquarters and sites, we elected to depend primarily upon qualitative written surveys and extensive telephone interviews as data collection strategies. Forty-one (41) individuals who held various positions, (i.e. Center directors, fellows, school administrators, teachers, county-support staff), were identified from around California to participate in the study. Of the forty-one participants, nineteen written surveys were completed with a return rate of 46%. We also conducted lengthy telephone interviews with sixteen individuals. These interviews ranged in length from 20 to 45 minutes, all were tape-recorded (with permission) and transcribed. In addition, we conducted formal "face-to-face" interviews ranging in length from one to two and one-half hours with the Center's leaders. We also visited two SB 1274 sites in the Los Angeles area. Additionally, we attended two regional meetings sponsored by CCSR and attended CCSR's annual symposium in San Diego.

In order to compensate for the fact that we were trying to capture events that had occurred between 1991 when the Center began[1] and 1996 when we started this project, we read and analyzed a number of documents about CCSR and its work. These ranged from evaluative and/or research reports to programs and resource books.

Working independently and collaboratively, we analyzed data from all of the sources noted above. As we did this, we looked primarily for themes and patterns across

[1] In 1990, the California State Assembly passed Senate Bill 1274 (SB 1274). Sponsored by State Senator Gary Hart and other reform advocates including the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) and the California Achievement Council, this bill was designed to provide resources in the form of monies and support to a group of schools in order to demonstrate the efficacy of school restructuring efforts. Dr. Maggie Szabo, formerly of the Coalition of Essential Schools and a leader in state and national educational reform, after the passage of this bill was charged with developing an organization to oversee the selection of schools to receive SB 1274 monies, to distribute funds, and to guide and support those institutions that received them. In 1991, Szabo, developed an organization that became the California Center for School Restructuring. After focusing on the distribution of funds in its first year, CCSR has overseen and supported reform work in schools.

sources that could inform us in regard to the guiding questions we noted above. At least twice during this process, we conferred with the Center's leaders to check impressions or to clarify some detail from the surveys, interviews, or documents.

Findings

In this section, by focusing on insights we gained into the work of CCSR as a result of this investigation, we use the guiding questions (described earlier) to organize our discussion. Here we suggest ways the data we collected in this project might shed light on these questions.

What, if anything, is unique about the California Center for School Restructuring as an organization, and what is unique about the work being done? or How do its theories or models of change and its "modes" of operation differ from those of other school change organizations?

As we spoke with the Center's leaders and others about the California Center for School Restructuring and analyzed surveys and data collected through telephone interviews, we discovered four recurring themes both about CCSR's change model and about the activities of the center staff that exemplify and promote it. And as we considered these themes in light of scholarship describing other reform strategies (e.g., Comer, 1980; Hess, 1995; Levin, 1987; Louis & Miles, 1990; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1989; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Wohlstetter & Smyer, 1994), we believe that they do represent a unique approach to change that differs, at times dramatically and at times subtly, from many other reform programs.

The first theme, identified by the vast majority of interviewees and survey respondents, and nicely articulated by a Center director, was that CCSR promoted the idea that "California's restructuring initiative must center on, start from, and flow from learning and teaching." Various center leaders indicated that they were unswerving in their belief that student learning and the kinds of teaching that promote it must be the centerpieces of reform for at least two reasons. First, their own experiences as educators had convinced

them that when teachers can clearly articulate their own visions of what kind of teaching and learning they want to produce, they will then be able to work on whatever would facilitate the kind of teaching and learning which in turn would allow all children the opportunity to learn in powerful ways.

We were struck by the strong commitment of Center leadership to keeping student learning at the center of their work. To assist schools to examine themselves even more critically and in far greater depth, CCSR, working with several SB 1274 schools, created and introduced the "Protocol" and "Cycles of Inquiry." These tools provided structure and a format for schools to identify areas of improvement and change and to create a forum for respectful and critical feedback. The protocol was designed primarily as a means for teacher teams to conduct regular reviews of progress. Described as a process of dialogue, the activity is also known as a "demonstration of restructuring" where participants of a school share their work, receive comments, and reflect on what matters most to their students. The cycles of inquiry were a set of activities by which schools could engage "the whole school community in examining student work and gathering and analyzing other forms of data.

Over time, the protocol and inquiry processes became not only valuable tools but also institutionalized procedures in schools and districts to analyze various concerns and issues throughout all the schools. The Center realized that 1274 sites, especially in the beginning, needed these strategies to move them beyond the obvious and to prompt them to stretch and to think in different ways. Taking the lead in developing these tools helped to move many schools forward.

A second theme, clearly articulated by six respondents and implied by the words of several others, was that CCSR embraced a non-directive approach to promoting change which became their own implicit theory of action. This seemed to grow out of a kind of "faith" that educators, once they began to reflect seriously upon student work, would seek out and implement practices that would build upon what was working and address and

change curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the like that were impeding good learning for all youngsters. Indeed, as one person noted in his survey, "The CCSR staff seemed to believe that school folks would do the right things if they were allowed to do them. If given the freedom to do so -- relieved of imposed constraints, teachers and principals would assess the performance of their students, identify gaps, and implement effective solutions."

Center leaders tended to believe that they could and should honor their ideals by engaging in a very indirect kind of leadership. As one director noted, "leading involves modeling generative problem solving (and) learning-centered kinds of teaching right from the start." She continued by recalling that "those of us in leadership roles read and reread Michael Fullan's *Change Forces* over and over again." This book seemed to influence their beliefs that their work involved supporting change and supporting adults, making meaning, and bringing up questions and issues.

The Center's leaders reported that their fundamental ideas about the kind of leadership that supports powerful change in school have not changed. They and their colleagues remain committed to the notion that change cannot be mandated by anyone at the top of education systems and they have continued to resist being overly directive with schools. At the same time, they have recognized the need for providing "more structured processes in order to create the conditions for people to want to change and then be able to change." This recognition led Center directors and fellows to search for ways to push schools to change unsuccessful practices. One Center leader noted that she began to see that modeling of powerful practices needed to be buttressed by more direct, personal engagement with educators and that she and her colleagues were recognizing the need to be somewhat more direct with schools on some issues. She states:

> We really have to be much more direct and support people to re-examine their personal beliefs about who can learn and (to confront) issues of race, language

> diversity, and bias of any kind. (We must) find ways to support people in non threatening, but nonetheless, non-compromising ways.

Others concurred and added that the commitments to more direct coaching of principals and teachers were being solidified by the implementation of stricter accountability systems. As previously discussed, the Center took a very non-directive approach with school sites, trusting them to develop accountability measures that worked in their specific settings. For a variety of reasons,[2] the results of schools' efforts to assess and report on their own work were disappointing. Thus, CCSR began to provide schools with more specific guidelines for evaluating their reform efforts. One interviewee, a teacher, described the evolving "accountability" process with these words:

> First it was very ambiguous as to what we were supposed to do -- in terms of accountability, or in terms of guidance as to what was supposed to be done. As the years progressed, I think they've evolved a little bit more, offered... given more guidance in regards to accountability... Every year they seem like they tighten up a little bit more. As an example, the first year at the symposium with the protocol, they asked us to make sure we had student outcomes, holistic learning outcomes. The following year they said that we should be looking at disaggregating data to make sure that we are addressing every kid's needs. And so forth...

This respondent suggested that the "tightening" of requirements was, at his school and within his region a cause of "a little bit of concern... as to what CCSR was going to ask of you."

Center leaders reported that they recognized that their increasing tendency to structure the accountability process was causing some anxiety among some schools. They also noted, though, that representatives from a number of sites had expressed appreciation

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[2] We have discussed these reasons in other sections of this paper. Some of our informants, for instance, suggest that educators used to very specific accountability systems had difficulty constructing their own without guidelines. Others noted that many teachers and administrators lacked training in collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data. And a few suggested that the culture of schools does not support efforts to assess or evaluate the work of educators.

for more guidance in this area. They also were confident that asking "hard" and "somewhat specific" questions of sites was important. As one stated:

Too many reports sounded like PQR (program quality review) reports. You know -- full of statements like "We are promoting critical thinking for all students" or "Parent involvement is increasing" -- without any discussion of what they were doing or any attempt to show how these things were affecting students. We needed to structure things a little more so they had to be specific -- to give us evidence to support their statements.

A third feature of CCSR is their commitment to modeling which became a cornerstone of the Center's work. Leaders clearly wanted to exemplify the very kind of teaching and learning they deemed necessary for 21st center learners. In order to do this, they looked to the wealth of research from the 80's and 90's that identified the very best practices associated with powerful teaching and learning. As one participant stated, "We pointed out to them (school participants) that we were modeling a kind of learning and a kind of way of translating information, but in a way that was likely to connect to the needs of the learner and to the place where they are."

A fourth distinctive characteristic of the California Center for School Restructuring, noted by interviewees, survey respondents, and researchers (Little et al.,1996), is this organization's strong and outspoken commitment to equity and diversity. Certainly, the seeds of this commitment were embedded in SB 1274 with its explicit recognition of the needs of California's diverse population.[3] However, from the very beginning, CCSR's leaders stressed, not only the functional need to "recognize" the state's diversity, but also the moral imperative, in the words of one, to confront and change an educational system "infected...with racism and classism."

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[3] One section of the legislation reads:

> As the state's population of school age children continues to change and grow more diverse in its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background, and as no group's characteristics, experience, or background represents the majority experience of California's pupil population, efforts to restructure public education in California must fundamentally enable schools and educators to better meet the needs of and ensure educational equality for a diverse pupil population. (California State Law, 1990a, 58901a)

When, in surveys and interviews, we asked about ways the Center had influenced reform activity in schools, nine interviewees and two survey respondents remarked specifically on ways CCSR's "anti-racist work... has been very helpful...personally and professionally." After visiting the L.A. office on several occasions and perusing a host of documents that were being used in Center activities, we were impressed by the fact that issues of race and problems related to subtle and not-so-subtle forms of institutional racism were being addressed in a very direct manner. For instance, the Center hosted nine days of "Anti-Racist Leadership Inquiry" and the important information taken from these sessions became the focus for their leadership team meetings. As a result, although some schools were more ready than others to grapple with the issues raised, all were at least willing to begin to explore the implications and in some cases confront the realities of institutional racism at their sites.

Two aspects of CCSR's work around issues of diversity seemed quite distinctive. First, as noted above, leaders within the Center spoke frequently of racism as a major impediment to both excellence and equity. As we reviewed positions of and statements by leaders of other reform movements (e.g. Hopfenberg et al., 1993), we noted much language that could be described as "pro-diversity" or "pro-equality," but only rarely did we find strong condemnation of racism. The boldness with which CCSR staff discussed such a complex, charged topic struck us as very courageous, and it apparently was having at least something of an impact on educators who were beginning to consider the possibility that "the assumptions we make about people of color and the structures that we build upon those assumptions" are "chief reason[s] that students of color don't do well."

Secondly, there exists a natural and logical link between CCSR's concern with having schools build their programs, structures, and practices on a careful examination of student work and their anti-racist stance. Current and former Center leaders ground their calls for thoughtful consideration of the impact of institutional racism on data from schools throughout the state and on a growing body of research, in the words of one CCSR leader,

conducted by "people who have an understanding of how minority students can be successful in our schools." The former reveal that, in general, poor children of color do not do as well as white, middle or upper class youngsters on standard measures of student achievement. The latter, in turn, contains research and reports, identifying characteristics of schools and classes where "students of color who [have traditionally been] poor achieving students...are NOT scoring lower than anyone else." Taken together, these two sets of data/literature suggest that deliberately changing practices and structures that impede learning can make a difference for all youngsters -- but especially for those who traditionally have been underserved by schools.

What work is being done by the Center and what factors have shaped the development of CCSR's activities?

Which aspects of CCSR's work received the most attention from survey and interview respondents? Virtually every site administrator or teacher who communicated with us spoke or wrote favorably of at least some of the *statewide activities* sponsored by CCSR for all participating schools. One principal for instance, stated:

> Any of the statewide things that I've gone to have really, really helped me. From the symposium, to the different trainings they have done, whatever the statewide piece, it has always been high quality, very helpful, sort of 'just what I needed at the right time' kind of stuff.

Others identified specific activities that had been especially meaningful for them and their colleagues. Six noted that the protocol had helped them and others at their site to think differently about the importance of basing decisions on a clear-headed assessment of student work. One educator indicated that her school was "now working on student achievement in terms of race" and credited the "protocol process" as providing a vehicle by which she and her colleagues could raise and talk about "very, very difficult issues." Further, she noted that the protocol has, in a sense, become institutionalized at her site.

> All of our teachers engage in a protocol, and at our mid-year institute -- we take five pupil free days in February and bank them together and call that our mid-year institute -- one of the major activities is that all the teachers are engaged in presenting their protocols to the school as a whole and then getting feedback on their work and then their next steps. And then our protocol team that ends up going to the symposium each year kind of metacognates about this process that is in place at our school and what does it mean and how does it help us and that type of thing so it has been a very powerful strategy for us.

Others agreed but also praised the cycles of inquiry as important tools in their sites. One teacher who admitted that her school had not moved as quickly through reform as she had hoped still credited "inquiry [as] an important piece" in jump-starting the change process. Several times she noted that "questioning" what they do and how it affects students was now common and that this had never occurred before at her school. Another indicated that the cycles of inquiry had a profound effect in his institution. He suggested that the protocol helped him and his colleagues to "move our discussion away from what teachers were 'delivering' to what students were learning." This educator also pointed out that the cycles of inquiry really helped teachers and administrators to make decisions about directions for their school.

Interestingly, it was this respondent who also raised a concern about cycles of inquiry that was echoed, in some form, by four respondents. This was the fact that inquiry at certain points, is by its very nature, an unstructured process (or, in his words, "Some steps in the cycle of inquiry are largely uncharted"). He and others noted that many teachers and administrators were unused to ill defined processes and that the ambiguity of inquiry caused some educators to balk thus inhibiting some schools from fully implementing reform strategies.

Networking received high marks from some of our study participants. For example, all twelve regions participated in regular networking meetings. In addition,

Center staff initiated school site visits that served as both viable communication vehicles and ways to discover what others were doing. Further support surfaced when one person, when asked "What role has CCSR had in your reform effort?" mentioned his school's participation in the "support network" as the central factor propelling restructuring at his site. Another noted that his school was located in a remote area and that participation in a regional network had enabled them to connect with other like-minded schools. However, he also stated that as an individual, he had probably benefited more from networking than others at his site who were not as committed to reform. Another principal, though, from a densely populated area said that networking had not been especially productive for those at her site. She indicated that her school was involved in many innovative activities and was, in many ways, breaking new ground in defining school governance, curriculum, and pedagogy. She reported that teachers often felt that they were "doing all the giving" in networking relationships, and she suggested that perhaps more attention should be paid to "matching" schools who are at similar stages of reform.

Factors shaping the development of CCSR's activities. As we reflected upon the work of CCSR and on the factors that influenced it, we became convinced that the basic "shape" of the activities was based upon a strong and shared commitment to the guiding principles that have defined this organization since its earliest days. Statewide activities such as the development of the protocol and cycles of inquiry, the establishment of networking opportunities and the like, were born out of core beliefs such as "the idea that students should be the center of what a school does and that practices should be developed around student work" and "the need to support -- build a support system that would center on what [schools'] perceived needs were."

We also came to believe that the changing shape of these activities was also linked to another guiding principle of this organization. This was a commitment to continually examining their own practices and revising them if data suggested that changes were warranted. One Center director describes this as a belief that reform is about learning --

about "testing hypotheses rather than implementing programs." As leaders described their thinking in tightening accountability measures or as they discussed the reasons they decided to boldly address racism as a barrier to reform, they continually stated that they were driven by evidence that changes or refinements were needed. They also told us however, that any shifts in their activities were carefully scrutinized and often hotly debated as staff members sought to honor their fundamental commitments even as they responded to schools' needs and problems.

What is valued about the Center's work?

As we read surveys and reviewed interview transcripts and noted reference after reference to the protocol, we wondered if this process was being done in a "pro forma" manner -- if educators were going through the motions of engaging in a set of conversations about their work but missing the opportunity to engage in serious consideration of the impact of their efforts on student learning. Data suggest that the notion of examining student work and using it as the basis for decisions and action has taken hold within many 1274 schools. Indeed, many of the survey respondents reported that CCSR had caused them to recognize the importance of analyzing student work and to use this as a basis for decision-making. We also though, have reason to believe that in many schools, this process is only beginning. Indeed, seven individuals (two survey respondents and five interviewees) stated that, in their view, many well-intentioned educators are now "looking" at student work but that they still lack the ability to analyze it in ways that yield data able to inform and guide practice. Nonetheless, although we have no assurance that our respondents are similar to the larger group of administrators and teachers in SB 1274 schools, their words leads us to agree with this statement by Little and her colleagues (1996):

> If there is one principal legacy of SB 1274, it is likely to be an increased disposition toward collective assessment of the quality of student work. More than we have seen in previous school improvement efforts, the restructuring schools have tried to

> cultivate a habit of more frequent, focused assessment of student work and student-related data. (p.15)

And we would add that participants in our investigation indicated that they recognized and appreciated CCSR as the instigator of this emerging "disposition" even though in some situations, schools still have a long way to go.

Another aspect of the Center's work that impressed us was something we alluded to above. This is the willingness of leaders to act in ways that are consistent with their core values and with their commitment to improve learning for all the children of California even if this led them down politically risky paths. We are thinking here especially about the stand of the Center, as previously discussed, against all forms of racism. Our data suggest that at least some schools are beginning to examine some of their structures and practices to see if, unintentionally, they are disadvantaging some students or groups. Respondents from these institutions are reporting that such an examination is a difficult, but rewarding one, and they credit CCSR with inspiring and supporting them in this effort.

Although the educators providing us with information indicated that they very much valued some of the resources CCSR provided to them, they also spoke (or wrote) about their respect for the way Center staff interacted with them and colleagues at their sites. The following comments -- all coming from principals or teachers -- are typical ones:

> CCSR has been invaluable -- through J ____ I learned a tremendous amount. He in particular pushed my thinking.... I learned through CCSR...what it looks like to be a leader of school improvement which is focused on student learning.
>
> CCSR staff have been available to provide resources and support for our restructuring efforts, school visitations, data collection, and protocol process.
>
> CCSR, in particular the leadership, has been most helpful to us in the area of focus [for our restructuring efforts]. Each time we had contact through the R & D project, leadership network, or general sessions we received further clarification

and direction to propel our work forward. We never questioned the motivation of the leadership. We trusted that our journey was one of discovery as was theirs. Our school particularly felt support from S ____ and C____, and others who visited us at our site and gave us that "personal touch."

In the course of studying CCSR, we began to share the views of respondents regarding valuable contributions this organization has made to the state's educational systems. We also though found ourselves discussing, with admiration, some additional characteristics of the Center, its leaders, and its work -- characteristics that, in our view, are worthy of mention. One of these characteristics is the "lean-at-the-top," flat nature of this organization. When we first visited the CCSR's Southern California offices, we were struck by the fact that an enormous amount of work with a great many schools was based in a one room office housing four people. We were also impressed with the absence of hierarchy in this setting. Furthermore, we learned that much of their time is spent in school sites, working closely with administrators, teachers, and others. Although we did not visit the other regional offices, we understand that each office is organized in a similar manner. We suggest that this structure is one that, in every way, captures the spirit that motivated the original SB 1274 legislation. Resources were clearly not being spent creating a bureaucratic infrastructure. Rather, money, energy, and attention were being directed to schools and, ultimately, the students attending them.

An additional and related aspect of the Center's structure within the larger environment is the independent nature of CCSR itself. It is not affiliated nor does it take direction from the California State Department of Education which may seem somewhat curious since 1274 funding comes directly from the state. But it is this autonomy that appears to allow great flexibility in providing services to schools and to give them the freedom to engage in highly creative and significant thinking. This independent level of thought and operation certainly seems to influence how schools operate and in many ways

has allowed schools to pursue and address issues that they might have never confronted without CCSR's help.

A further consideration related to the Center's work and its structure is the internal nature of the organization itself -- dedicated service oriented people who intensely focus on issues related to students' learning and achievement and who truly believe that educators are professionals. In some respects, the Center might be "modeling" the way districts might want to consider operating with a lean-at-the-top structure and an entirely altered and distinctive framework for thinking differently about central leadership and its role, as does CCSR. Districts would be well-served to explore this method of operation.

Finally, we are quite taken with the willingness of CCSR leadership to acknowledge success and failure and to strive to learn from both and to continually refine their work. It is always difficult to evaluate school reform efforts. This reality coupled with the fact that continued funding often depends upon glowing and dramatic achievements often causes organizations to shy away from taking hard looks at themselves. The California Center for School Restructuring faces these challenges as much as other school improvement agencies, but it has not run away from a self-assessment. We attended two major meetings and engaged in numerous conversations with staff that focused on analyzing how CCSR activities are -- or are not -- making a difference for schools and the children attending them. Not only has this ongoing reflection led to positive changes in the Center's work, it has also modeled a practice and process of honest consideration of data for schools.

What work remains to be done?

Views from participants in this study. Various themes consistently emerged from our data. One of these, nicely articulated by one respondent, is the reality that "change is a chaotic and non-linear process." Another theme, again in respondents' words is that "the journey never ends," and "the work will never be done." Still another issue relates specifically to the role of CCSR in assisting schools as they engage in the

difficult, but important, task of reform. Every person who participated in this investigation -- without exception -- stated that the California Center for School Restructuring has helped at least some schools to make substantial changes that are benefiting schools. Respondents also reported that CCSR has helped an even larger set of institutions to at least begin their journey toward improvement. Furthermore, everyone indicated that they believed CCSR could and should play a role in continuing the work that has begun.

Lessons Learned/Implications

Because we are hopeful that CCSR will continue to work with schools, we also add our voices to the chorus of those talking of "what remains to be done" as we share some of the lessons we have learned about CCSR, their implications, and insights about the complex task of supporting and promoting school reform.

The first lesson relates to the impact of a school's "readiness" on the success of reform and on receptivity to the work of CCSR. Throughout our study, we continually heard the words: "We just need more time." These were uttered by teachers, administrators, district officials, policy makers, and other reform-minded persons throughout the state. As we discussed this issue with various participants, we discovered that a number of them believed that a site's ability to move through any particular type of reform was related to its readiness to undertake change. The words of one individual capture an idea expressed by many. He used the metaphor of a train on (or off) its tracks and suggested that "time would... likely be wasted by all involved in school change -- school leaders, CCSR leaders, school districts, etc. -- if the demonstrating schools are not already on the tracks when offered facilitating leadership and funds." This person contended that it takes a great deal of time and energy to get a school to a point of readiness -- much as it takes great effort to hoist a stationary train onto its tracks. However, if a school is ready to do some serious work, if it is already "on the tracks" and

moving forward with some sense of direction, then money and coaching can have immediate meaning and lead to a demonstrable pay off for teachers and students.

Critical to the notion of "readiness," we reviewed data and discussed the results of early analyses with CCSR and with others who have been involved in efforts to promote educational transformation, we realized that schools that were not making much progress toward reform seemed to share certain characteristics. Respondents from these schools, when asked "What were the big issues in your school prior to your submitting a proposal to become an SB 1274 school?" who gave us a long list of "problems" invariably went on to say that they had not made much progress in reaching goals. For example, one individual noted that "student achievement" and "absenteeism" were concerns at his site. He also, though, stated "We seemed to have kind of lost a focus on student outcomes" and noted that his school got bogged down "with issues dealing with implementation." This person reported that CCSR had helped his site to move, but he expressed frustration at the ambiguity of some of the activities and a longing for some tighter accountability procedures suggesting these could provide a needed structure to guide work at his school. A similar perspective was offered by another person who had a difficult time even identifying the issues that were important before they became an SB 1274 school. When asked if any progress had been made at her site, she stated, "I don't think anything has been really resolved because my school has been in transition constantly." Then, she too, expressed the view that CCSR could have been more specific: "In most cases people would have been happier if they would have just been told what to do instead of using discovery methods." This response once again points to the frustrations surrounding CCSR's overall non-directive approach making any sort of movement extremely difficult for some.

Another respondent listed several serious problems (i.e. drill work, focus only on teacher, low expectations for students, no parental involvement) as "big" pre-SB 1274 issues at his site. This individual reported that much progress had been made in certain areas (e.g. site-based decision-making; technology; and shared high expectations for

students) and that CCSR has been "a big player in our change." However she also noted that actually penetrating classrooms and "improving education by attempting to meet every child's need is ongoing and very difficult."

In contrast, schools that became a part of the SB 1274 network with more of a "common focus" and at least the beginnings of a "collaborative, continuous improvement culture" seemed to be more able to utilize opportunities such as participation in the protocol process to spark "collegial dialogue[s] and feedback." Representatives from these sites reported such achievements as the institution of annual literacy assessments for all children, "systematic examination of student work to show growth over time," the development of "schoolwide learning goals, content standards, common and performance benchmark assessments with rubrics and scoring guides," and serious, schoolwide reflection on structures and practices because of CCSR's "anti-racist leadership stance."

Many of the survey respondents and interviewees providing us with information about CCSR reflected, at some length, about the ways a site's readiness could and should affect its participation in reform activity. At least three strongly suggested that organizations such as the Center needed to focus their efforts almost entirely on schools that have clearly proven that they can change in ways that have widespread, lasting, and positive impact on students. Three others, although they did not recommend that funds and support be cut off for non-performing schools, indicated that they were very pessimistic about the possibility of institutions with a long history of "being stuck" getting to a point where they could undertake serious reform. One basically said that only "new" schools were in a good position to improve. Another agreed, claiming "almost categorically, an existing school can't reform." Yet another respondent believed an "old" institution could change with new and energizing leadership. She stated, "We have come to expect change with a new leader, it is expected that this person will find some fault with the old system and suggest new ideas."

Center directors and fellows were much more optimistic about the possibility of change for many, if not most schools. Although they readily admitted that much of their initial idealism had waned, they were still convinced most educators wanted to "do the right thing" for students and believed that their job was to build upon that good will. Furthermore, one Center Fellow insisted that "we don't really have the luxury to pick only some schools to work with. There are kids in *all* the schools." Another, when we asked about the impact of a site's readiness on reform, laughingly stated:

> I think its like being ready to have a baby. I mean who's <u>really ready</u> for that. Sure some people are more ready than others and that's great, but it doesn't mean that we don't work with the ones who aren't. Just as unprepared parents may need more help and support -- we may need to really work with the schools that aren't ready to change.

He then, in a very thoughtful way, noted that this was "one of the big questions" CCSR faced which creates a serious dilemma, "Do you work where you're likely to be successful or where you're most needed?" He concluded, "I don't know the answer to that one. I don't think anyone does." His comments coupled with others we heard suggest that many may be struggling with the important decisions of where efforts and energy should be focused. This issue certainly has implications for future reform efforts.

We wonder if Center leadership (or, for that matter, anyone concerned with supporting school site reform) might be wise to offer different types of support to schools depending upon the readiness of the site to engage in serious change activity. This, of course, would mean that some way of determining site readiness would have to be developed along with the realization that readiness at any one site may be constantly fraught with fits and starts thus compromising the reform implementation timeline. Anticipating some of these issues, it might also require CCSR leadership staff to focus on issues such as conflict management, communication, and team-building with some schools before helping them move to serious reflection on student work, careful consideration of ways

teaching does, could, and should influence learning, and genuine change in school structures and classroom processes. There is danger in the approach we are recommending. Schools could get "stuck" in the getting ready stage and never move into the core work of learning and teaching. There is also, though, merit to the idea if schools are not taking advantage of processes such as the protocol and cycles of inquiry to really improve opportunities for youngsters.

A second "lesson" we have learned as we have engaged in this study relates to the strengths and limitations of "modeling" as a reform strategy. We continue to be enormously impressed with the commitment on the part of CCSR's leadership to model the kinds of processes they hope to see in schools. And we need to reiterate that many participants in our investigation spoke with great appreciation of the consistency with which staff "practiced what they preached." Interestingly, many of those who spoke favorably of CCSR's activities in this area stated that observing leaders in action -- questioning and struggling and changing practices and testing ideas -- had a personal impact on them. They also, though, reported that many persons in schools -- oriented in the words of one "to compliance," had a great deal of difficulty with the ambiguity of inquiry. We wondered if site leaders, persons who had perhaps worked closely with Center leadership, were having difficulty articulating the reasons for engaging in somewhat unstructured open-ended processes involving questioning and discovery -- if, perhaps, they were modeling some powerful practices but not helping colleagues to understand the theories driving their actions. It seemed to us that reform-minded educators within sites might be helped by some discussion of ways they could practice a constructivist form of leadership with persons (often in rather large numbers) who are used to and comfortable with bureaucratic, "top-down" leadership.

A third lesson we learned as a result of this research is that accountability within school settings is an enormously complex phenomenon. We discovered several factors that contribute to this complexity. First, it is quite difficult to identify, much less "measure"

some of the most important outcomes of schooling. Second, many strategies for more effectively assessing student growth are costly and time-consuming. Third, schools who do attempt holistic, performance-based assessments are often frustrated by the fact that institutions at the next level not only want numbers describing students, they want "the" numbers with which they are familiar -- CTBS scores, SAT scores, and the like. Fourth, faculty and administrators in many schools resist anything that attempts to determine if, what, and how students are learning and to link these with teaching practices. And fifth, even if all of the factors listed above can be addressed, many educators do not know how to collect and interpret student data. With the exception of a perfunctory statistics class or two, there is little in pre- or in-service development for teachers or administrators that equips them to thoughtfully consider and use information from and about students. This implies that schools who are not yet "ready" may balk at accountability measures simply because they may be viewed as too difficult to tackle, thus slowing reform. The California Center for School Restructuring has begun to wrestle this issue but again, they are faced with a dilemma. Do they work in schools that are "ready" to embrace accountability or do they expend their efforts on those who are struggling to get up to speed?

Finally, we are reminded, especially through this research, that change is extraordinarily complex. All of the activities that we have discussed above reflect efforts of CCSR staff to respond to an ever increasing awareness of the difficulty of changing educational cultures and practices as well as the complexity associated with reform.

Person after person, in interviews, survey responses, and informal conversations reported that their work with SB 1274 schools had caused them to realize that transformation is "harder even than we thought." Interestingly, most expressing this view spoke far less about "things" related to complexity (e.g. school size or money) than they did about the "people" part of the change process. One person's words nicely capture ideas offered by many respondents. He noted:

> Primarily the thing that I now believe or see is that the central dynamic that either prevents a school from changing or leads to successful reform is how relationships get built -- all the intricate web of social relationships between teachers, students, administrators, the community, the district. When I say relationships I mean the face to face interactions that people have, the communications that they have. I think that the power that those relationships have is clearer to me now.

Others concurred, citing faculty instability, resistance to change, interpersonal and inter-school rivalries, power struggles, and deeply embedded attitudes and beliefs as factors that not only inhibited efforts at reform but also contributed to stress and burn-out.

Center staff had to discover ways to cope with these complexity factors on two levels. On one, they needed to help principals and teachers discover ways to respond to colleagues within their site who were blocking change, and they needed to encourage individuals committed to reform as their enthusiasm waned. On another level, directors and Center fellows had to find ways to work through their own disappointments and frustrations and to work with one another in effective ways in order to better support school-based educators as they attempted to build learning communities at the school sites.

What does it take to support reform? Certainly, a tremendous amount such as a focused commitment on issues that truly matter, (i.e. their anti-racist stand), a non-directive leadership style with a willingness to infuse more structured approaches and accountability, modeling or "walking the talk," mechanisms to promote networking, an honest examination of practices coupled with strategies to alter course if data suggests a change is necessary, and an acknowledgment of schools' varying readiness levels. All of these characteristics, when supported by a lean at the top and independent organizational structure, appear to form a unique combination of elements that when implemented simultaneously, have the potential of successfully and positively supporting reform.

Yet, the perennial question remains. Is it possible to replicate these conditions and if so, how/where/can schools/districts infuse the same strategies used by CCSR into their own settings? Or, is success in this case a creation of happenstance where unique conditions (CCSR's support) and settings (schools that were "ready") slowly evolved together creating an unusual "reform mix" at a specific moment? Just as the Centers' leaders continue to grapple with the dilemma of where to place reform efforts and resources, so too must policy makers decide if supporting the creation of these same conditions are key to future reform efforts thus warranting finances and time.

As we learned from and about the Center's work, we were given just a taste of the thoughtful and reflective practices which guided their efforts to cope with the many challenges and complexities they faced. We experienced their frustrations, their hopes, and their energy. With these experiences fresh in our minds, we left the California Center for School Restructuring thinking far more deeply about how reform can be supported and the dilemmas reform efforts create. We will also continue to discuss the uniqueness of their work far into the future.

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